

(The following is an excerpt of South Dakota Public Broadcasting's Forum News Hour.)

MS. RUSSELL: Let's move now to West Point, Pennsylvania, via phone. Brothers Michael and Ben Marino are the owners and developers of the website probush.com. Ben joins us now. Thanks for being with us today. Hi, Ben.

MR. MARINO: Hi. How are you, Joan?

MS. RUSSELL: Pretty good. Let's begin with your background. You -- your brother, the two of you have this probush.com. Tell us about why you bought it, the domain, the name, and when it was.

MR. MARINO: Well, I think I had mentioned to you before that basically this all started because I -- I have an interest in purchasing domain names. It's just basically a hobby of mine. And we generally do not develop the websites that I have.

MS. RUSSELL: Oh, okay.

MR. MARINO: I have quite -- quite a few, a couple hundred, that are just kind of a collector's item. The particular one that we came across about a year and a half ago was probush.com. And we realized it was not registered. And on top of that, we realized that there are no pro Bush sites on the internet. And we kind of felt that there are so many sites on the internet that

1 are degrading to the President, call and I -- I heard  
2 Mr. Epp saying about, you know, being accused of a  
3 capital crime.

4 I mean President Bush is accused every day by someone  
5 of being a murderer, a tyrant. I mean people -- people  
6 are -- on the left are very firey and hold no punches  
7 when it comes to accusing our President of being a  
8 downright murderer. So that also is certainly a crime  
9 punishable by death. And I don't see how, you know -- in  
10 fact, the people who call him -- who call the President a  
11 murderer rarely, you know, say that it's a parody.  
12 Rarely say it in a satirical form.

13 *is is ahead short*  
14 Our -- our defense in, you know, saying that it is a  
15 satire and it is a parody is that of course we don't  
16 believe that these people are traitors to the United  
17 States. I mean that's a -- that's a factual -- that's  
18 just a factual event. There is -- there is no traitorous  
19 activity on their behalf.

20 Yes, the website was designed, like any website, to  
21 attract traffic and to gain attention, and the traitor  
22 list certainly became the more controversial part of the  
23 site. I don't know if you're familiar with, though, the  
24 really -- the popularity of site really grew because of  
25 our Ari fan club.

MS. RUSSELL: Ari Fleischer. Ari Fleischer.

1 MR. MARINO: Ari Fleischer, the popularity of Ari  
2 Fleischer. So that's one thing to keep in mind. I mean  
3 the nature of this site is by all means not  
4 wholeheartedly directed at offending people to the point  
5 of accusing them of capital crimes.

6 MS. RUSSELL: But you now are faced with a lawsuit.  
7 You and your brother are the only two involved in this,  
8 is that correct? Is this --

9 MR. MARINO: Yes.

10 MS. RUSSELL: Is this a hobby or a business? You are  
11 26 and 20 years old, correct?

12 MR. MARINO: Yes, correct. We're two pretty young  
13 guys. Just something we did for fun, was a hobby.

14 MS. RUSSELL: It cost you eight dollars?

15 MR. MARINO: Yes, it cost us eight dollars to  
16 originally register the domain. But it's costing us much  
17 more to keep the site up, to be honest with you. Costing  
18 us almost 500 dollars a month in hosting because the site  
19 receives so much traffic. We do not really sell any  
20 product or service besides, you know, T-shirts and  
21 there's a -- some links on the site that you can buy  
22 books and posters here and there, but they are not our  
23 merchandise. The only thing that we sell to make any --  
24 generate any revenue is actual probush.com T-shirts, we  
25 sell traitor T-shirts. And believe it or not, we've sold

1           traitor hats and traitor T-shirts to people because I  
2           think at this point in the country, the country is  
3           changing.

4           MS. RUSSELL: But isn't that cashing in on what has  
5           happened with the war in Iraq and -- and terrorism?

6           MR. MARINO: You could say that if we were making a  
7           profit. However, all of that money goes right back to  
8           pay to keep the site up, so --

9           MS. RUSSELL: Which is a hobby for you?

10          MR. MARINO: It is a hobby.

11          MS. RUSSELL: Were you motivated by money or  
12          morality?

13          MR. MARINO: Motivated more by -- this is  
14          interesting. I wouldn't say so much morality. I would  
15          say we were motivated by defending the President. There  
16          is no one who speaks out, at least on the internet, in  
17          defense of the President. And there is no one who goes  
18          after the President's enemies like the President's  
19          enemies go after him, if you see what I'm saying.

20          So the -- we certainly consider at the very least in  
21          a reality, you know -- while we don't consider these  
22          people real traitors or legal traitors, we do consider  
23          them enemies of the President. They are -- they are  
24          condescending towards him, they never give him the  
25          benefit of the doubt. He is the commander in chief. He

1 demands respect, and he doesn't get it.

2 And one of the things that we've -- one of the  
3 statements that I like to stick by is that I understand  
4 freedom of speech, I understand the freedom to speak out  
5 against the President. However, I don't understand at  
6 what point in this country freedom of speech and  
7 respecting your President became two mutually exclusive  
8 events.

9 MS. RUSSELL: We're talking with Ben Marino who is  
10 the co-owner with his brother Michael of probush.com  
11 which has published a traitor list, and it includes  
12 former South Dakota Senator Jim Abourezk who practices  
13 law now in Sioux Falls. And Mr. Abourezk is suing the  
14 Marinos for five million dollars. This is an eight  
15 dollar purchased hobby you say for reasons to defend your  
16 President which is going to cost you thousands of dollars  
17 in legal bills, I suspect.

18 MR. MARINO: Absolutely.

19 MS. RUSSELL: What research did you do on Jim  
20 Abourezk to, I guess, qualify him to put him on this list  
21 as a traitor?

22 MR. MARINO: Well, the -- the first reason -- I guess  
23 let me clear it up for the listeners, that the traitor  
24 list really is copied from the master list of celebrities  
25 and, if you will, important people in our society who



1 signed the Not In Our Name petition that's so -- we felt  
2 that was -- that whole petition was done in very bad  
3 taste.

4 We felt that the people who signed that petition were  
5 trying to separate themselves from this administration,  
6 and we feel that while it is healthy to separate yourself  
7 from the administration, we live in a post 9-11 world.  
8 This is very different circumstances. The world is  
9 changing every day, and we feel like there is one -- if  
10 there's one thing that needs to remain constant or needs  
11 to really be important to this country, that is  
12 unconditional respect for the President. Not saying that  
13 you -- you know, it's very healthy to disagree with the  
14 President, but I don't see the -- the need when something  
15 is what it is and the President is acting on it, and he  
16 has the support of Congress, and he has the support of  
17 the, you know, his fellow politicians, I think that it  
18 seems a little bit distasteful to go out, and especially  
19 what the Dixie Chicks did, going out to another country  
20 and saying that they were ashamed of -- that the  
21 President was from the same state that they were. I mean  
22 this is -- this is the kind of stuff we are talking  
23 about.

24 We -- we sympathize with Mr. Epp and Mr. Abourezk in  
25 terms of -- that they don't want to be -- have Mr.

1 Abourezk labeled as a traitor, even if it is a parody,  
2 and we do believe it is a parody. We're not -- you know,  
3 we're -- we're almost -- I guess it is -- it is a fishy  
4 situation because we do consider ourselves conservative,  
5 but we're really kind of taking a liberal angle on this  
6 and a -- a liberal angle on utilizing our freedom of  
7 speech to the fullest, just as the left does every single  
8 day.

9 MS. RUSSELL: But what did Jim Abnor -- or Jim Abnor,  
10 I'm sorry, he's another former South Dakota senator --  
11 Jim Abourezk -- Abourezk do to put him on the list? Was  
12 he on this master list that you got?

13 MR. MARINO: Yes. First of all, he was on the master  
14 list.

15 MS. RUSSELL: Did you buy that or copy it or --

16 MR. MARINO: He signed the master list.

17 MS. RUSSELL: Who did?

18 MR. MARINO: We went to the website when it was --

19 MS. RUSSELL: Who -- what -- who signed what now?

20 MR. MARINO: The Not In Our Name. The Not In Our  
21 Name petition. And basically that petition --

22 MS. RUSSELL: Oh. Okay.

23 MR. MARINO: -- was saying that anything that  
24 happened --

25 MS. RUSSELL: Yes.

27:25

1 MR. MARINO: They were trying -- it was -- it was  
2 some kind of ridiculous moral high ground petition to say  
3 that -- to the rest of the world, you know, we don't --  
4 we don't want you to think that this war is in our name,  
5 you know. This blood is on the hands of the President or  
6 this blood is on the hands of the administration. And  
7 you know what -- I mean the President made it clear that,  
8 you know, you are with us or you are with the enemy.  
9 And, you know, whether they like it or not, their country  
10 is involved in this -- in this war, and the terrorists  
11 are not going to carry around in their back pocket a Not  
12 In Our Name petition and be like, oh, we can't hit  
13 targets with these people because, you know, they're --  
14 they're sympathetic to, you know, the -- the problems in  
15 the Middle East and et cetera.

16 I mean it -- it seems like -- as if there is so much  
17 confusion on the left that these people don't comprehend  
18 that our entire -- our entire western civilization is on  
19 the line when it comes to terrorism and the -- the  
20 problems that are going on right now in the Middle East.

21 MS. RUSSELL: Do you wish you had not published the  
22 traitor list?

23 MR. MARINO: Absolutely not.

24 MS. RUSSELL: You wish -- but when you say we live in  
25 a different world since 9-11 as we -- we know we do, you



1 -- could you have said "enemy" instead of "traitor" --

2 MR. MARINO: Umm --

3 MS. RUSSELL: -- because you said -- because you did  
4 refer to enemies of the President and --

5 MR. MARINO: I suppose in -- in hindsight "traitor"  
6 may have been a strong word. We certainly chose that  
7 word, though, because it was a strong word. I would not  
8 say -- like I said, the whole nature of it -- I mean  
9 perhaps if we had made an enemy list, we wouldn't even  
10 need a disclaimer to say that the site is a parody.

11 The traitor list is -- see, what -- I guess really  
12 if -- if people are having trouble understanding what the  
13 parody is about, the parody is about all of these people  
14 who -- I mean there's many layers to this. There's  
15 plenty of people who run around screaming that Bush is on  
16 the verge of starting World War III, that Bush is going  
17 to be rounding up people and putting them in camps like  
18 Guantanamo Bay, that everyone's going to lose their  
19 personal freedom, that the Patriot Act is going to do  
20 this and this and this.

21 And that -- the traitor list is a parody about that.  
22 It's not a parody as to whether these people are traitors  
23 or not. It's a parody about if there -- if they really  
24 think that Bush is getting to that point, it's a parody  
25 about this type of -- these -- these are the so-called

1 people who he would be rounding up. You -- you see what  
2 I'm saying? It's -- it's -- it's a very multi-layer --  
3 multi-layered parody.

4 But I have believe that -- and believe me, there's  
5 plenty of intelligent people out there. We get e-mails,  
6 50 to 100 e-mails a day, from very intelligent people,  
7 liberals, conservatives, who say they appreciate the  
8 traitor list. They -- they support our freedom, our  
9 freedom of speech to make -- to make satire, to make a  
10 parody, and they understand the whole underlying concept  
11 of the traitor list. Many people see it and say, oh,  
12 you're calling me a traitor. No, I'm not calling you a  
13 traitor. I'm satirizing the whole -- the whole  
14 atmosphere in this country right now.

15 MS. RUSSELL: But you did call him a traitor.

16 MR. MARINO: I don't -- I -- I disagree with -- with  
17 you there. I mean --

18 MS. RUSSELL: No.

19 MR. MARINO: He's -- he's listed on a traitor list.

20 MS. RUSSELL: On the traitor list, on --

21 MR. MARINO: I -- I never came out and said that he  
22 is a traitor.

23 MS. RUSSELL: Okay.

24 MR. MARINO: And I wouldn't do that.

25 MS. RUSSELL: Okay.

1 MR. MARINO: You know, he's listed on the list, and  
2 the list is a parody. So I believe that it's very clear,  
3 and it -- it is also very clear -- I mean we get e-mails  
4 every day from people who send their pictures in and --

5 MS. RUSSELL: Uh-huh.

6 MR. MARINO: -- say put me on the traitor list. Put  
7 me on the traitor list because, you know what, they  
8 understand what the traitor list is about.

9 MS. RUSSELL: Uh-huh.

10 MR. MARINO: They understand that, you know, it's the  
11 kind of thing where you -- you're proud to stand up  
12 against the President, you're proud to be -- you want to  
13 lead the country into a dissenting voice in that everyone  
14 in America should have an equal say as to what's going on  
15 in the country. And that would be -- that's an ideal  
16 democracy, and that's not reality in America. Reality in  
17 America is what it is. I mean the decision makers are  
18 the decision makers, and everything is slanted towards  
19 public policy. And I think liberals are just very angry  
20 right now that the majority of the public in America does  
21 support this President.

22 MS. RUSSELL: Ben Marino, owner of pro --  
23 probush.com. And just 30 seconds left or so before we  
24 have to leave you. Any final thoughts that you want to  
25 say to South Dakotans?

1 MR. MARINO: Well, South Dakotans, I -- I suppose --  
2 I guess it's a confusing situation. I hope that they're  
3 not bitter towards this -- towards this whole thing.  
4 I -- I hope that they see that support of the President  
5 is important, and that even though we are maybe in the  
6 position to be made an example out of, we believe that  
7 we're doing the right thing and leading this country to  
8 the next phase which is a very stern patriotism, and not  
9 giving the benefit of the doubt to terrorists every time.

10 MS. RUSSELL: Do you plan to change the website at  
11 all --

12 MR. MARINO: Ahh, no.

13 MS. RUSSELL: -- the traitor list regarding --

14 MR. MARINO: The web --

15 MS. RUSSELL: -- Senator -- former Senator Abourezk?

16 MR. MARINO: The website gets updated every day.

17 MS. RUSSELL: But the traitor list, will you make any  
18 changes in regard to the name of Senator James Abourezk?

19 MR. MARINO: I can honestly tell you if -- if Mr.  
20 Abourezk had come to us in a reasonable manner, personal  
21 manner, and -- and not in the form of legal letters right  
22 out the gate asking for legal fees, if he had come to us  
23 and said, look, you know, I am a reasonable guy, I don't  
24 appreciate being on your list.

25 MS. RUSSELL: He said that he -- that there was a

1 letter acting -- asking for a retraction and apology.

2 MR. MARINO: And he certainly left out the legal  
3 fees.

4 MS. RUSSELL: What -- what was that?

5 MR. MARINO: The legal fees at -- at the first  
6 juncture was about 2500 dollars.

7 MS. RUSSELL: When was that?

8 MR. MARINO: About a good month and a half or so ago.  
9 So -- and that was the first we had heard. And from that  
10 point, you know, being in the financial position that  
11 we're in, we had no options to deal. You see what I'm  
12 saying. But certainly if it had been a -- a request from  
13 the get-go, say, look, I don't appreciate this, you know,  
14 I personally would not like to be on it, you know, we  
15 would certainly honor that or consider honoring it at  
16 least.

17 I know that -- and the other -- the other point is  
18 I've -- I've had discussions with Matthew Rothschild of  
19 the *Progressive*. He's done a few articles on this. In  
20 fact, he's the one that really broke the story that this  
21 was getting escalated to the level of a lawsuit. And he  
22 -- he considers being on the traitor list a badge of  
23 honor.

24 So I certainly wouldn't -- I certainly would say that  
25 Mr. Abourezk is just one of these individuals who takes



1 -- takes this offense very gravely. And I think that is  
2 part of the American way. There's offensive stuff out  
3 there everywhere. And it comes from both sides. And I  
4 -- you know, there's plenty of stuff that, you know,  
5 Mr. Abourezk has said that is offensive to our whole  
6 administration and to our --

7 MS. RUSSELL: Well --

8 MR. MARINO: -- whole system of government. I don't  
9 appreciate his comments on Hizbollah and how he's proud  
10 of the work that they have done in -- in Lebanon in  
11 pushing the Israelis back. Hizbollah is a terrorist  
12 organization.

13 MS. RUSSELL: But you would say that he has -- he has  
14 every right to express his opinion?

15 MR. MARINO: He certainly --

16 MS. RUSSELL: Okay. And --

17 MR. MARINO: -- does have that right.

18 MS. RUSSELL: And, Ben, I will have to wrap it up  
19 with you. We're going to bring in Professor Burns now,  
20 but I appreciate -- Ben Marino, thank you for with us.

21 MR. MARINO: Thank you, Joan.

22 MS. RUSSELL: And keep us posted, and we'll talk to  
23 you soon, okay?

24 MR. MARINO: All right. Great. Take care.

25 MS. RUSSELL: You bet.